

***NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE INSTRUCTION 10-911
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***Operations and Services
Hydrologic Services Program, NWSPD 10-9
RIVER FORECAST CENTER OPERATIONS***

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SUMMARY OF REVISIONS: This directive supersedes NWS Instruction 10-911, dated September 17, 2002. The following revisions were made to this instruction:

- (1) Added description of how river forecast centers (RFC) provide the equivalent of 24-hours per day, 7 days per week service availability to their partnering water management agencies and supported WFOs.
- (2) Added sections highlighting WFO/RFC collaboration and RFC support for WFO hydrologic training and outreach efforts for customers and partners.
- (3) Revised the section on non-real-time operations to highlight the equivalency between “non-real-time operations” and “development activities.”

Signed

August 21, 2003

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Date

River Forecast Center Operations

<u>Table of Contents:</u>	<u>Page</u>
1. Introduction	3
2. Staff Operational Responsibilities and Specialty Areas	3
2.1 Hydrologist In Charge	3
2.2 Development and Operations Hydrologist	3
2.3 Senior Hydrologic Forecaster	3
2.4 Senior Hydrometeorological Analysis and Support Forecaster	3
2.5 Hydrologic Forecaster	4
2.6 Hydrometeorological Analysis and Support Forecaster	4
2.7 Hydrologic Intern	4
2.8 Hydrologic Technician	4
3. Hours of Operation	4
3.1 Routine Hours of Operation	5
3.2 Extension to 24-Hour Operation	5
3.3 Off-hour Contact	5
3.4 Continuous Product/Data System Viability	5
4. Routine Operations	5
4.1 Assimilation of Observed Data	5
4.2 Assimilation of Forecast Data	5
4.2.1 Quantitative Precipitation Forecasts	6
4.2.2 Temperature Forecasts	6
4.3 Hydrologic Forecast Operations	6
4.4 Flash Flood Guidance Operations	6
4.5 WFO Support Operations	6
4.5.1 HAS Function Coordination	6
4.5.2 Hydrologic Forecast Coordination	6
4.5.3 WFO Hydrologic Model Support	6
4.5.4 WFO Staff and Customer Training	7
4.5.5 WFO Customer Outreach	7
4.5.6 RFC/WFO Collaboration	7
4.6 Interagency Support and Forecast Exchange	7
4.7 Forecast Verification	7
4.8 Non-Real-Time Operations	8
5. Non-Routine Operations	8
5.1 Dam Failures	8
5.2 Hazardous Materials (HAZMAT) Spills	8

1. Introduction. This directive specifies national instructions on National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) National Weather Service (NWS) river forecast center (RFC) operations needed to ensure basic consistency among all centers. It provides flexibility to account for user requirements in each RFC area. Instructions on content of RFC products are described in NWS Instructions 10-912 and 10-913. This directive describes the operations conducted to produce those products and services.

2. Staff Operational Responsibilities and Specialty Areas. Operational staff responsibilities specified here are common to all RFCs. Many centers have unique staff responsibilities which account for hydroclimatological characteristics and specialized requirements of customers and partners in the RFC area.

2.1 Hydrologist In Charge. The hydrologist in charge (HIC) provides oversight and management for all activities in the RFC, and has ultimate responsibility for quality of hydrologic and hydrometeorologic services provided by the RFC. The HIC manages RFC involvement in cooperative efforts with weather forecast offices (WFO) and other NWS offices as well as water-oriented agencies outside the NWS.

2.2 Development and Operations Hydrologist. The development and operations hydrologist (DOH) is part of the operational RFC management team, and among other managerial functions, directs the implementation and operational support for hydrologic forecasting technology employed in the RFC such as the NWS river forecast system (NWSRFS). He/she performs operational forecast operations, including the hydrometeorological analysis and support (HAS) function. The DOH is the point of contact for hydrologic research publications and other scientific developments of the RFC, oversees training activities for the RFC staff, and ensures hydrologic training to the staff of supporting WFOs as requested.

2.3 Senior Hydrologic Forecaster. Senior hydrologic forecasters serve as the lead hydrologic forecasters in daily RFC shift operations, and are ultimately responsible for timeliness and accuracy of the river forecasts issued by their shift. A senior hydrologic forecaster may work HAS shifts as required.

At the discretion of the HIC, a senior hydrologic forecaster may serve as the RFC's subject matter expert in a variety of specialty areas determined by the requirements of the RFC. Such specialty areas include flash flood hydrology, extended range streamflow forecasting, computer systems and their application to RFC operations, snow hydrology, dam failure hydrology, site specific hydrologic modeling at WFOs, hydrologic modeling techniques, and hydrometeorological data systems.

2.4 Senior Hydrometeorological Analysis and Support Forecaster. The senior HAS forecaster serves as program leader for the RFC's HAS functions. Senior HAS forecasters perform HAS operations as outlined for HAS forecasters in section 2.6 below; and, if qualified, perform hydrologic forecast operations as outlined for hydrologic forecasters in section 2.5 below. The senior HAS forecaster guides the execution of hydrometeorological operations at the RFC and ensures that the necessary hydrometeorological training is available to other staff personnel. The senior HAS forecaster oversees development, maintenance, and implementation of computerized

procedures used in hydrometeorological support operations. She/he also provides operations-oriented hydrometeorological training to the RFC staff and, when requested, the staff at associated WFOs.

2.5 Hydrologic Forecaster. Hydrologic forecasters perform the routine and specialized hydrologic forecast operations of the RFC. These include short-, medium-, and long-term streamflow forecast operations. Hydrologic forecasters participate in procedure development activities of the RFC. Qualified hydrologic forecasters also work HAS shifts as required. A hydrologic forecaster may also serve as a focal point for an area of specialization as determined by the HIC.

2.6 Hydrometeorological Analysis and Support Forecaster. In conjunction with the senior HAS forecaster, the HAS forecasters perform the basic hydrometeorological analysis and support functions at the RFC. These basic HAS shift functions include assimilation and quality assurance of observed and forecast data sets for use in the hydrologic modeling process, production of hydrometeorological discussions and other coordination products, and coordination activities with forecasters in associated WFOs and the Hydrometeorological Prediction Center (HPC) of the National Centers for Environmental Prediction (NCEP). Qualified HAS forecasters also perform hydrologic forecast operations as required. HAS shifts during flood situations should generally be staffed by the HAS forecasters or senior HAS forecaster, with the remaining HAS shifts covered, as necessary, by other appropriately trained RFC staff.

HAS forecasters may provide advice and support to WFOs as needed. HAS forecasters also apply their meteorological expertise to specialized activities above and beyond the basic HAS functions such as quantitative precipitation forecast (QPF) verification analysis and development and improvement of hydrometeorological procedures.

2.7 Hydrologic Intern. RFC hydrologic interns perform operational support and procedure development activities designed to familiarize them with hydrologic/hydrometeorologic operations at the RFC and/or the WFO. Hydrologic interns may work at offices other than RFCs such as a WFO, or a regional/national headquarters office. Hydrologic interns participate in continuing education and professional development activities in hydrology and/or meteorology through NWS training mechanisms and university course work.

2.8 Hydrologic Technician. Hydrologic technicians (at RFCs which employ them) conduct data collection and quality control activities. Hydrologic technicians at some RFCs also perform administrative assistant duties.

3. Hours of Operation. As described in the following section, RFCs are considered to provide 24-hours per day, 7 days per week service availability to their partnering water management agencies and supported WFOs through their nominal 16 hours, 7 days per week schedules; extension to 24-hour operations when needed; designation of off-hour contacts; and establishment of procedures to ensure viability of mission-critical products and data systems during unstaffed periods.

3.1 Routine Hours of Operation. Nominal office staffing for RFCs is 16 hours per day and 7 days per week. Minor adjustments to nominal staffing are made to meet local requirements. At RFCs serving areas with climatologically-defined period(s) of low hydrologic activity, shorter hours of coverage may be provided if approval is given by regional headquarters.

3.2 Extension to 24-Hour Operation. During periods when moderate or greater flooding has begun or is expected, RFCs extend staffing to 24 hours per day. For periods of prolonged moderate flooding, 24-hour operations may not be necessary. For these cases, RFCs will coordinate with WFOs to determine the optimum hours of operation. In addition, following coordination with affected WFOs, RFC management may decide to extend RFC staffing (1) during periods when minor flooding is observed or expected or (2) to provide hydrometeorological support during periods when flash flood events are either occurring or expected on a widespread basis.

3.3 Off-hour Contact. RFCs will establish procedures to be used by their supported WFOs for contacting RFC personnel during off hours to obtain hydrologic expertise or request RFC office staffing. These contacts will be achieved through a mutually agreeable mechanism and instructions for contacts will be shared with supported WFOs on a daily basis.

3.4 Continuous Product/Data System Viability. Procedures will be established to ensure the viability of mission-critical RFC products and essential data systems during all periods.

4. Routine Operations. RFCs provide river forecasts and hydrologic guidance to their partners, which consist of WFOs, NCEP service centers, other RFCs, and cooperating water-related agencies. The forecasts and guidance are used for the protection of life and property associated with flooding, and to provide water resource information to support commerce and economic decisions. Instructions on key components of RFC operations are presented below.

4.1 Assimilation of Observed Data. Assimilation of stream stage, precipitation, temperature, and other hydrometeorological data from ground-based networks as required for the hydrologic modeling process is essential to RFC operations. WFOs support the quality control of data from ground-based networks which are assimilated by the RFCs. RFCs also assimilate gridded precipitation estimates from remote sensing technologies such as radar and satellite to form a mosaic of precipitation observations.

The mosaic of precipitation observations and remotely-sensed precipitation estimates forms a quantitative precipitation estimate (QPE) for the RFC area. The QPE is provided to NCEP and associated WFOs as required to support forecast and warning operations and verification activities. RFC QPE products are made available to the public and media customers via the Internet.

4.2 Assimilation of Forecast Data. All RFCs use quantitative precipitation forecasts (QPF), temperature forecasts, and, where applicable, other forecast information as input to the NWS river forecast system. HICs coordinate RFC requirements and schedules for NCEP QPFs and temperature forecasts with the regional headquarters and the Hydrologic Services Division in the Office of Climate, Water, and Weather Services. RFC requirements and schedules for locally-

produced forecasts supplementing national forecasts, where deemed appropriate, are coordinated by regional headquarters with the HICs and affected meteorologists in charge.

4.2.1 Quantitative Precipitation Forecasts. RFCs in the conterminous United States receive QPF guidance from the HPC and make adjustments as necessary before entering it into their operational hydrologic modeling system. RFCs coordinate with HPC and affected WFOs when operationally significant changes are made to QPF guidance.

RFC QPF products are made available to the public and media customers over NWS-supported public dissemination pathways and are posted on the Internet. RFCs forward quantitative precipitation estimate (QPE) and QPF products to the National Precipitation Verification Unit.

4.2.2 Temperature Forecasts. Temperature forecast information needed in RFC hydrologic modeling operations is acquired through use of routinely issued products from NCEP or supported WFOs. However, RFCs may request specialized temperature forecast support from NCEP or WFOs if routinely issued products are insufficient for hydrologic modeling operations.

4.3 Hydrologic Forecast Operations. Partner requirements, consistent with regional and national policy, are the predominant driver of RFC hydrologic forecast operations. The two primary partners for RFCs are NWS field offices (primarily WFOs) and external water-related agencies.

4.4 Flash Flood Guidance Operations. Flash flood guidance serves as key input to the evaluation of flash flood threat at WFOs. It also may serve as an index of soil moisture for some simplified WFO flash flood warning and forecast applications. RFCs will monitor the quality of their flash flood guidance, particularly as it relates to areas near shared RFC boundaries, and coordinate routinely to ensure flash flood guidance is as consistent as physically reasonable from one RFC area to the next.

4.5 WFO Support Operations. RFCs conduct several types of support activities with WFOs which facilitate effective execution of hydrologic services at both offices. These activities can be divided roughly between HAS function coordination activities and hydrologic forecast coordination activities. RFCs and WFOs are full partners in achieving successful warning and forecast operations for every hydrologic event.

4.5.1 HAS Function Coordination. HAS function coordination encompasses interaction with other offices on hydrometeorological inputs to hydrologic operations (see section 2.6). The HAS function serves as a liaison with WFOs to ensure the full utilization of hydrometeorological data in the hydrologic modeling process.

4.5.2 Hydrologic Forecast Coordination. RFCs support WFO hydrologic operations by providing expert advice and assistance on hydrologic forecasts when necessary. More details on this hydrologic forecast coordination process are contained in NWS Instruction 10-921.

4.5.3 WFO Hydrologic Model Support. If a supported WFO uses RFC model variable states as input to its site-specific hydrologic modeling system, the RFC should provide the appropriate

variable states from its operational forecast system to the WFO each time the states are updated. This applies to variable states updated through incorporation of new hydrometeorological data or manual modification of the variable states themselves.

4.5.4 WFO Staff Training. As feasible within existing resource limitations, RFCs assist in the hydrologic training of staff at supported WFOs when requested. Within these limitations, RFC personnel should visit their supported WFOs to provide training and observe WFO hydrologic operations.

4.5.5 WFO Customer Outreach. As feasible within existing resource limitations, RFCs assist in efforts to provide hydrologic outreach and training to WFO customers when requested. RFCs should coordinate with their supported WFOs on ideas and proposals for improving hydrologic services to customers and partners.

4.5.6 RFC/WFO Collaboration. RFCs and WFOs should make collaboration and teamwork an intentional activity. Programs, initiatives, and ideas that advance NWS hydrologic services should be identified, recognized, and shared. Each RFC should work with its supported WFOs to develop a hydrologic collaboration plan to increase the sharing of technology and information as well as improve the support for customer and partner education.

4.6 Interagency Support and Forecast Exchange. RFCs have a variety of interactions with external water-related partners in addition to their support for WFOs. These coordination responsibilities help fulfill the NWS's mission by ensuring the NWS hydrologic services program complements the water-related activities of other agencies. RFCs have considerable latitude to configure their forecast operations to meet the requirements of these external-NWS partners.

RFCs may exchange their forecasts directly with their cooperators as part of the two-way information exchange process associated with hydrologic forecast operations. If any forecast values are subsequently changed through coordination with WFOs, RFCs should ensure that the updated forecast value(s) replace the old information stored in the server/database accessed by cooperators.

RFCs will maintain operational contacts with partners responsible for maintaining stream gaging stations (e.g., district offices of the U.S. Geological Survey [USGS]) in the RFC area. Prior to and during high flow events, real-time coordination occurs as much as possible between the RFC and streamflow measuring crews. Agencies and key personnel who perform operational maintenance of stream gaging stations are listed in RFC station duty manuals, and RFC phone numbers are provided to these agencies for posting in each stream gage house. RFCs also work with partners to provide efficient two-way exchange of routine information, including forecasts, data, and rating tables.

4.7 Forecast Verification. RFCs conduct operations in support of the verification of hydrologic forecasts. All national requirements for RFC verification activities are subject to availability of nationally-supported verification procedures.

4.8 Non-Real-Time Operations. Non-real-time operations are defined as those non-administrative, non-training-oriented activities which are conducted in support of operational forecast functions. These non-real-time operations, or *development activities*, are recognized as essential to maintaining the ongoing operational readiness of each RFC. Each RFC should allocate a significant amount of work hours for development activities, predominately in the area of model calibration and procedure development but also in other areas deemed important by the HIC. Details on the oversight of RFC development activities are contained in policies and procedures under NWS Policy Directive 80-7, *River Forecast Center Development Management*.

5. Non-Routine Operations. Certain types of unusual events require a specialized operational response at RFCs. RFC responsibilities during these events are described in this section.

5.1 Dam Failures. WFOs serve as the point of issuance for hydrologic products associated with dam failures. The RFC role in these situations is primarily in the area of support, such as providing forecast information derived from the RFC dam break (DAMBRK) model or other sources for incorporation into the WFO dam catalog. RFCs also support WFO efforts to maximize use of simplified dam break model (SMPDBK) by providing advice, training, and expertise as appropriate.

5.2 Hazardous Materials (HAZMAT) Spills. RFCs, under some conditions, provide estimates of time-of-travel for HAZMAT spills into rivers. They also support other NOAA-related missions when they can be of service.